

PROFILING STUDENT READING LEVELS

Data Helps Teachers Identify Instructional Needs

By Don Burger and Monica Mann

In years past, it was very difficult to establish a cause and effect relationship between instructional strategies and student learning. Every child got the same lesson at the same tempo, regardless of individual learning differences.

Computer technology provides an opportunity for teachers and administrators to improve student learning.

Technology acts as a bridge, making data available for teachers to evaluate instructional strategies. Once clear learning targets are set for students, teachers can use classroom databases to continuously monitor student progress. Teachers can regroup students or tailor instruction to meet unique needs. Administrators can use databases to connect student achievement to staff development needs and to evaluate the impact of professional development. Data can help identify programs or instructional strategies that should be discarded.

designed formative and summative reading assessments. The management system will assist teachers in the analysis of teaching strategies and will give administrators snapshots of student learning throughout the year. Based on results, teachers can discard ineffective reading strategies or make improvements in others. Similarly, administrators can evaluate the impact of professional development or identify specific needs for staff development.

To determine how best to serve 1st grade readers, for example, teachers measure student performance using four different assessments: concepts about print, alphabetic letter identification, alphabetic sound recognition, and sight word identification (see figure). First, school staff members and PREL site facilitators and reading specialists work together to determine grade-level expectations for each assessment. After administering the assessments and inputting the data, school staff can select and organize the information to create graphs that provide quick profiles of student performance across a class, grade level, or school. These graphs convert student scores into four categories:

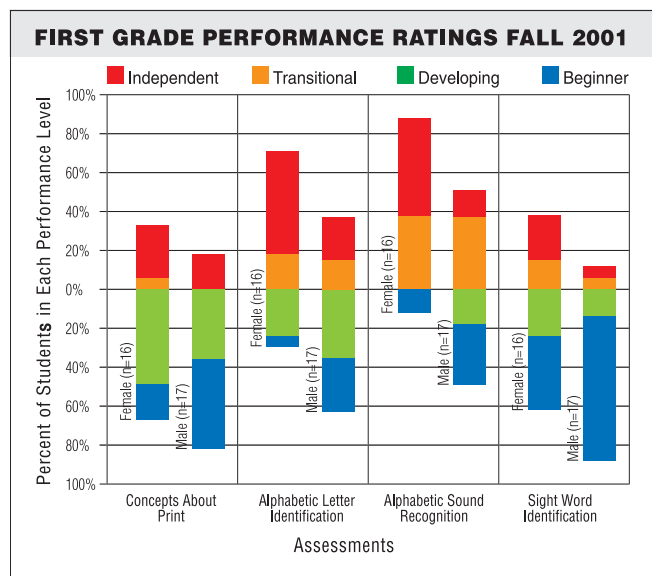
- **independent**, which means that the student knows and applies most skills and strategies;
- **transitional**, which means the student knows and applies many skills and strategies;
- **developing**, which means the student knows and applies some skills and strategies;
- **beginner**, which means the student knows and applies few skills and strategies.

These scores translate into *cutpoints*. Cutpoints are predetermined categories that place scores into levels. The staff sets these levels and cutpoints.

The scores above the zero line indicate that expectations have been met or exceeded. Scores below the line identify those who have not met the expectation. In a standards-based system, this process helps staff establish priorities for school improvement goals, professional development, and modifications to instructional strategies or materials. Using a database and a spreadsheet program, a school staff can store, organize, display, and analyze data easily.

For more information about assessment and assessment software, readers can consult www.wested.org/acwt. While this is a useful place to begin searching, the software entries have not been evaluated or endorsed by PREL. For more information about PREL's Pacific Education Data Management System, please see "Educational Data Management" on page 16.

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▷ Database reports help teachers monitor student progress.

As part of the Pacific Communities with High-performance In Literacy Development (CHILD) project, the Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory (Pacific REL) is currently working with 10 Co-Development Partner (CDP) schools to improve student achievement in reading. Elementary schools participating in the Pacific CHILD project will be using information technology and assessment tools to monitor student progress in reading. Dr. Kyaw Soe has modified PREL's Pacific Education Data Management System to focus on the data relevant to this project.

The Pacific CHILD Data Management System holds information about the school, teachers, students, and student learning. To measure student performance, Pacific CHILD staff has